UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

Platform Capitalism and Social Networks

2627-2-F8804N019

Learning objectives

Knowledge and understanding
By the end of the course, students will have acquired an advanced understanding of the principal theories of personal social networks, organisational networks and social capital. They will understand the conceptual and methodological foundations of Social Network Analysis (SNA) and Organisational Network Analysis (ONA), together with the contribution of social capital to the analysis of organisations, economic development and platform-based organisational forms.

Applying knowledge and understanding
Students will apply theoretical concepts and methodological tools to organisational and socio-economic systems. They will learn to collect, represent and interpret network data using the basic principles of SNA and ONA and will apply social capital as an analytical lens for interpreting empirical cases concerning organisations, economic development, platform economies and public policy.

Making judgements
Students will develop the ability to critically evaluate organisational structures, network configurations and the role of social capital by integrating theoretical perspectives with empirical evidence gathered through project work and case-study analysis.
Communication skills
Students will communicate sociological analyses effectively through written reports, oral presentations and collaborative discussion.

Learning skills
Students will strengthen their autonomous learning skills through independent reading, collaborative research, empirical analysis and critical reflection, transferring theoretical and methodological knowledge to new organisational and policy contexts.

Contents

The course introduces the analysis of social networks, organisations and social capital. It combines theoretical perspectives with practical applications, enabling students to understand personal and organisational networks, their measurement and interpretation, and the contribution of social capital to economic development, platform economies and public policy. The course includes two group projects: an Organisational Network Analysis and an interpretative case study based on the concept of social capital.

Detailed program

The course is organised into four closely interconnected modules that progressively guide students from the analysis of individual social networks to the understanding of organisations and broader socio-economic systems.
Throughout the course, students undertake two group projects designed to apply the theoretical and methodological knowledge acquired during the module.

The first part introduces the concept of personal social networks through an examination of the principal theoretical approaches that have shaped the network perspective in the social sciences. Particular attention is devoted to the conceptual and methodological foundations of Social Network Analysis (SNA), including the operationalisation of social relationships, network data collection, network visualisation, and the basic measures used to describe and interpret network structures.

The second part focuses on the application of network analysis to organisations. It examines the relationship between formal organisational structures and informal networks, the role of networks in organisational processes and change, and the contribution of Organisational Network Analysis (ONA) to the study of organisations. Students will also gain practical experience with network analysis software and will apply ONA to an organisational restructuring case through a first group project.

The third part explores the concept of social capital and the principal sociological theories that have contributed to its development. Particular attention is devoted to the relationship between social networks and social capital, with a focus on trust, reciprocity, brokerage, cohesion and collective action, highlighting the role of social capital as an individual, and collective resource.

The fourth part broadens the analytical perspective to economic development, with particular attention to local and territorial development and platform economies. The course examines how social capital, institutions and regulatory frameworks shape different forms of economic coordination and distinct organisational configurations of digital platforms, discussing their implications for governance and public policy.

Alongside the taught components of the course, students complete two complementary group projects.
The first project applies Organisational Network Analysis (ONA) to an organisational restructuring case, enabling students to analyse and interpret organisational networks using the methodological tools introduced during the course.
The second project consists of an interpretative case study on a topic proposed by the lecturer and agreed with each group.
Students analyse the selected case using the concept of social capital as their principal analytical framework.

Lectures are devoted to introducing the course and its organisation, presenting the principal theoretical and methodological concepts, discussing empirical research and case studies, and supporting students in the development of their project work. Independent learning activities include the reading of selected scientific literature, the analysis of research materials, and the preparation of individual and group assignments. Project work involves collaborative group activities, the analysis of empirical materials, the preparation of written reports in Word format, and the development of PowerPoint presentations.

The final presentation and discussion of the group projects take place during the last two class sessions. Students who do not participate in the blended-learning activities will follow an alternative assessment pathway, as described in the section on assessment methods.

Prerequisites

Basic English language knowledge

Teaching methods

The course is delivered in blended mode and combines direct instruction with independent and collaborative learning activities. All scheduled classroom hours are delivered face-to-face. Teaching methods include lectures, discussion of empirical research and organisational case studies, independent reading of scientific literature, collaborative group work, analysis of research materials, preparation of written reports and PowerPoint presentations. The two group projects provide opportunities to apply both methodological skills (ONA) and theoretical interpretation through the lens of social capital.

Assessment methods

Two assessment pathways are available: Pathway 1 (Continuous Assessment) and Pathway 2 (Final Assessment).
Pathway 1 – Continuous Assessment
The final mark is awarded according to the Italian 30-point grading scale and is based on the following assessment components:

Group Project I – Organisational Network Analysis (ONA) 30%
Individual Quiz 40%
Group Project II – Interpretative Case Study 30%

Each assessment component is marked according to the Italian 30-point grading scale. The final mark is calculated as the weighted average of the marks obtained in the three assessment components, using the weightings specified above.
Submission deadlines for each assessment component will be communicated at the beginning of the course and published on the University's online learning platform. Students are required to complete all assessment components and to meet the corresponding submission deadlines.

Pathway 2 – Final Assessment

Students who will be assessed through a final examination.
The final assessment consists of two components:
• an individual organisational case analysis based on Social Network Analysis (SNA). The assignment must be submitted via the University's online learning platform no later than one day before the examination session for which the student has registered. Students are required to notify the lecturer (alberta.andreotti@unimib.it) upon submission;
• a written examination covering the entire course syllabus, consisting of 40 multiple-choice questions and 4 open-ended questions.
The multiple-choice questions contribute 70% of the final examination mark, while the open-ended questions

contribute the remaining 30%.

Textbooks and Reading Materials

Scott, J. (2017) Social network analysis, Sage, Cap: Introduction, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6.
The complete reading list will be provided at the beginning of the course.

Semester

II semester

Teaching language

English

Sustainable Development Goals

GENDER EQUALITY | DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH | INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE | REDUCED INEQUALITIES | SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES